

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SINGAP 04253 130620Z

15

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

COME-00 DOTE-00 EB-07 FMC-01 SAL-01 CG-00 DLOS-06

OES-06 TRSE-00 OMB-01 INT-05 FEA-01 /096 W

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R 130555Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6159

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

CONCPAC HONOLULU HI

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY LONDON

CINPACTLFT MAKALAPA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 4253

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EWWT, MMOL, PFOR, SN, UR

SUBJECT: REJECTION BY GOS OF SOVIET BUNKERING FACILITIES IN
SINGAPORE

REF: (A) SINGAPORE 954, (B) SINGAPORE A-66

1. ON AUGUST 31 ENGLISH LANGUAGE TABLOID NEW NATION
GAVE PROMINENT AND RATHER SENSATIONAL COVERAGE TO
REJECTION BY GOS OF "SOVIET PLEA FOR BUNKER TERMINAL".

THE ACCOUNT, ASCRIBED TO AN UNIDENTIFIED OFFICIAL
SOURCE, RELATED THE GOS' REJECTION OF THREE SOVIET
REQUESTS TO SET UP THEIR OWN BUNKERING FACILITIES.

THE FIRST REQUEST CAME "SOME YEARS BEFORE 1973"; THE
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PAGE 02 SINGAP 04253 130620Z

SECOND " SHORTLY AFTER THE ENERGY CRISIS BROKE IN 1973";

AND THE MOST RECENT "SOMETHING LAST YEAR (1975)". THE REJECTION WAS JUSTIFIED BY THE GOS SOURCE ON THE GROUNDS THAT "SINGAPORE'S PORT FACILITIES ARE OPEN TO ALL COUNTRIES. SINGAPORE IS NOT A BASE FOR ANY BIG POWER. IT ONLY DEFERS SERVICING AND REPAIR FACILITIES ON A COMMERCIAL BASIS." THE REPORT EXPLAINED THAT THE SOVIET REQUESTS "COME AT A TIME WHEN AN INCREASING NUMBER OF SOVIET SHIPS ARE CALLING AT SINGAPORE". THE BALANCE OF THE ARTICLE SUPPORTED THIS STATEMENT BY PROVIDING SOME OF THE DETAIL CONTAINED IN REF B.

2. COMMENT. NONE OF THE FACTS RELATED IN THE FOREGOING PRESS ACCOUNT ARE IMMEDIATELY RECENT -- THE LAST SOVIET REQUEST WAS MADE IN LATE 1975 (REF A) -- OR, FOR THAT MATTER, ALL THAT NEW: OIL COMPANY REPRESENTATIVES AND OTHERS HERE HAVE BEEN AWARE OF THE SOVIET INTEREST. THE QUESTION ARISES, THEN, AS TO WHY THE SUBJECT WAS GIVEN BROAD PUBLICITY AT THIS TIME. IN RETROSPECT, IT APPEARS THAT THE GOS MAY HAVE BEEN PROMPTED TO PROVIDE AN "OFFICIAL VERSION" OF THE SITUATION TO THE PRESS IN ORDER TO REBUT A MISLEADING REPORT WHICH HAD APPEARED IN THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS AND TO FORESTALL ADDITIONAL COVERAGE WHICH COULD HAVE MISREPRESENTED THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION AND POSSIBLY OFFENDED THE SOVIETS. THE NEW NATION ARTICLE INCLUDED A DENIAL BY THE GOS SOURCE OF AN AUGUST 20 LONDON DAILY TELEGRAPH REPORT THAT THE SOVIETS HAD APPLIED TO SET UP A TRAWLER BASE IN SINGAPORE. IN ADDITION, WE HAVE A RELIABLE REPORT THAT IN AUGUST PRIME MINISTER LEE RESPONDED WITH A DEFINITIVE "NO" TO AN AUSTRALIAN JOURNALIST'S QUESTION ON WHETHER THE GOS WOULD GRANT THE SOVIETS ADDITIONAL BERTHING FACILITIES. CONSIDERING THE MISINFORMATION AND PURE SPECULATION WHICH EXISTS LOCALLY CONCERNING SOVIET MARITIME INTERESTS AND OBJECTIVES IN SINGAPORE, THE GOS MAY SIMPLY HAVE DECIDED TO GET AS MUCH OF THE STORY (AS THE GOS SEES IT, NATURALLY), INTO THE OPEN.

3. ALTERNATIVELY, THE GOS MAY HAVE FELT THAT IT WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 SINGAP 04253 130620Z

ABOUT TO COME UNDER RENEWED SOVIET PRESSURE FOR FACILITIES OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER. IT MAY THEREFORE HAVE DECIDED TO USE PUBLIC CHANNELS TO FORESTALL SUCH AN APPROACH AS WELL AS TO PUT PRIVATE FIRMS ON NOTICE THAT ANY SPECIAL DEALS WITH THE SOVIETS WOULD BE DISALLOWED. INDEED, THE GOS SOURCE QUOTED BY NEW NATION ANNOUNCED (IN WHAT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN A PREPARED STATEMENT) THAT "IT IS THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY THAT BUNKERING FACILITIES MAY ONLY BE ALLOWED TO

COMPANIES WHICH HAVE SUBSTANTIAL INVESTMENTS IN OIL
REFINERIES IN SINGAPORE".
GRANT

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